THE VALLEY of the GIANTS

By PETER B. KYNE

Author of "Cappy Ricks"

CHAPTER XVIII—Continued.

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"I suppose so," she answered, "although I think until very recently that it was those sixteen townships of red cedar—that crown grant in British Columbia in which you induced me to invest four hundred thousand dollars. You will remember that you purchased that timber for me from the Caribou Timber company, Limited. You said it was an unparalleled investment. Quite recently I learned—no matter how—that you were the principal owner of the Caribou Timber company, Limited! Smart as you are, somebody swindled you with that red cedar. It was a wonderful stand of timber—so read the cruiser's report—but fifty per cent of it, despite its green and flourishing appearance, is hollow-butted! And the remaining fifty per cent of sound timber cannot be logged unless the rotten timber is logged also and gotten out of the way. And I am informed that logging it spells bankruptcy."

She gazed at him steadily, but without malice; his face crimsoned and then paled; presently his glance sought the carpet. While he struggled to formulate a verbal defense against her accusation Shirley continued:

"You had erected a huge sawmill and built and equipped a logging road before you discovered you had been swindled. So, in order to save as much as possible from the wreck, you decided to unload your white elephant on somebody else. I was the readiest victim. You were the executor of my father's estate—you were my guardian and financial adviser, and so you found it very, very easy to swindle me!"

"I had my back to the wall," he quavered. "I was desperate—and it wasn't at all the bad investment you have been told it is. You had the money—more money than you knew what to do with—and with the proceeds of the sale of those cedar lands, I knew I could make an investment in California redwood and more than retrieve my fortunes—make big money for both of us."

"You might have borrowed the money from me. You know I have never hesitated to join in your enterprises."

"This was too big a deal for you, Shirley. I had vision. I could see inestimable riches in this redwood empire, but it was a tremendous gamble and required twenty millions to swing it at the very start. I dreamed of the control of California redwood; and if you will stand by me, Shirley, I shall yet make my dream come true—and half of it shall be yours. It has always been my intention to buy back from you secretly and at a nice profit to you that Caribou red cedar, and with the acquisition of the Cardigan properties I would have been in position to do so. Why, that Cardigan tract in the San Hedrin which we will buy in within a year for half a million, is worth five millions at least. And by that time, I feel certain—in fact, I know—the Northern Pacific will commence building in from the south, from Willits."

"I shall—" he began, but he paused abruptly, as if he had suddenly remembered that tact and not pugnacity was the requirement for the handling of this ticklish situation.

She silenced him with a disdainful gesture. "You shall not smash the Cardigans," she declared firmly. "You are devoid of mercy, of a sense of sportsmanship. Now, then, Uncle Seth, listen to me: You have twenty-four hours in which to make up your mind whether to accept my ultimatum or refuse it. If you refuse, I shall prosecute you for fraud and a betrayal of trust as my father's executor on that red cedar timber deal."

He brightened a trifle. "I'm afraid that would be a long, hard row to hoe, my dear, and of course, I shall have to defend myself."

"In addition," the girl went on quietly, "the county grand jury shall be furnished with a stenographic report of your conversation of Thursday night with Mayor Poundstone. That will not be a long, hard row to hoe, Uncle Seth, for in addition to the stenographer, I have another reliable witness, Judge Moore. Your casual disposal of my sedan as a bribe to the mayor will be hard to explain and rather amusing, in view of the fact that Bryce Cardigan managed to frighten Mr. Poundstone into returning the sedan while you were away. And if that is not sufficient for my purpose, I have the sworn confession of the Black Minorca that you gave him five hundred dollars to kill Bryce Cardigan. Your woods boss, Rondeau, will also swear that you approached him with a proposition to do away with Bryce Cardigan. I think, therefore, that you will readily see how impossible a situation you have managed to create and will not disagree with me when I suggest that it would be better for you to leave this county."

His face had gone gray and haggard. "I can't," he murmured. "I can't leave this great business now. Your own interests in the company render such a course unthinkable. Without my hand at the helm, things will go to smash."

"I'll risk that. I want to get rid of that worthless red cedar timber; so I think you had better buy it back from me at the same figures at which you sold it to me."

"But I haven't the money and I can't borrow it. I—I—"

"I will have the equivalent in stock of the Laguna Grande Lumber company. You will call on Judge Moore to complete the transaction and leave with him your resignation as president of the Laguna Grande Lumber company."

The Colonel raised his glance and bent it upon her in cold appraisal. She met it with firmness, and the thought came to him: "She is a Pennington!" And hope died out in his heart. He began pleading in maudlin fashion for mercy, for compromise. But the girl was obdurate.

"I am showing you more mercy than you deserve—you to whom mercy was ever a sign of weakness, of vacillation. There is a gulf between us, Uncle Seth—a gulf which for a long time I have dimly sensed and which, because of my recent discoveries, has widened until it can no longer be bridged."

He wrung his hands in desperation and slid to his knees before her; with hypocritical endearments he strove to take her hand, but she drew away from him. "Don't touch me," she cried sharply and with a breaking note in her voice. "You planned to kill Bryce Cardigan! And for that—and that alone—I shall never forgive you."

She fled from the office, leaving him cringing and grovelling on the floor. "There will be no directors' meeting, Mr. Sexton," she informed the manager as she passed through the general office. "It is postponed."

That trying interview had wrenched Shirley's soul to a degree that left her faint and weak. She at once set out on a long drive, in the hope that before she turned homeward again she might regain something of her customary composure.

Presently the asphaltum-paved street gave way to a dirt road and terminated abruptly at the boundaries of a field that sloped gently upward—a field studded with huge black redwood stumps showing dismally through coronets of young redwoods that grew riotously around the base of the departed parent trees. From the fringe of the thicket thus formed, the terminus of an old skid-road showed and a signboard, freshly painted, pointed the way to the Valley of the Giants.

Shirley had not intended to come here, but now that she had arrived, it occurred to her that it was here she wanted to come. Parking her car by the side of the road, she alighted and proceeded up the old skid, now newly planked and with the encroaching forestration cut away so that the daylight might enter from above. On over the gentle divide she went and down toward the amphitheater where the primeval giants grew. And as she approached it, the sound that is silence in the redwoods—the thunderous diapason of the centuries—wove its spell upon her; quickly, imperceptibly there faded from her mind the

"Who Is It?"

memory of that grovelling Thing she had left behind in the mill-office, and in its place there came a subtle peace, a feeling of awe, of wonder—such a feeling, indeed, as must come to one in the realization that man is distant but God is near.

A cluster of wild orchids pendent from the great fungus-covered roots of a giant challenged her attention. She gathered them. Farther on, in a spot where a shaft of sunlight fell, she plucked an armful of golden California poppies and flaming rhododendren, and with her delicate burden she came at length to the giant-guarded clearing where the halo of sunlight fell upon the grave of Bryce Cardigan's mother. There were red roses on it—a couple of dozen, at least, and these she rearranged in order to make room for her own offering.

"Poor dear!" she murmured audibly. "God didn't spare you for much happiness, did he?"

A voice, deep, resonant, kindly, spoke a few feet away. "Who is it?"

Shirley, startled, turned swiftly. Seated across the little amphitheater in a lumberjack's easy-chair fashioned from an old barrel, John Cardigan sat, his sightless gaze bent upon her. "Who is it?" he repeated.

"Shirley Sumner," she answered. "You do not know me, Mr. Cardigan."

"No," replied he, "I do not. That is a name I have heard, however. You are Seth Pennington's niece. Is someone with you?"

"I am quite alone, Mr. Cardigan."

"And why did you come here alone?" he queried.

"I—I wanted to think."

"You mean you wanted to think clearly, my dear. Ah, yes, this is the place for thoughts." He was silent a moment. Then: "You were thinking aloud, Miss Shirley Sumner. I heard you. You said: 'Poor dear' God didn't spare you for much happiness, did he?' Then you knew—about her being here."

"Yes, sir. Some ten years ago, when I was a very little girl, I met your son Bryce. He gave me a ride on his Indian pony, and we came here. So I remember."

"Well, I declare! Ten years ago, eh? You've met, eh? You've met Bryce since his return to Sequoia, I believe. He's quite a fellow now."

"He is indeed."

John Cardigan nodded sagely. "So that's why you thought aloud," he remarked impersonally. "Bryce told you about her. You are right, Miss Shirley Sumner. God didn't give her much time for happiness—just three years; but oh, such wonderful years! Such wonderful years!

"It was mighty fine of you to bring flowers," he announced presently. "I appreciate that. I wish I could see you. You must be a dear, nice, thoughtful girl. Won't you sit down and talk to me?"

"I should be glad to," she answered, and seated herself on the brown carpet of redwood twigs close to his chair.

"So you came up here to do a little clear thinking," he continued in his deliberate, amiable tones. "Do you come here often?"

"This is the third time in ten years," she answered. "I feel that I have no business to intrude here. This is your shrine, and strangers should not profane it."

"I think I should have resented the presence of any other person, Miss Sumner. I resented you—until you spoke."

"I'm glad you said that, Mr. Cardigan. It sets me at ease."

"I hadn't been up here for nearly two years until recently. You see I—I don't own the Valley of the Giants any more."

"Indeed. To whom have you sold it?"

"I do not know, Miss Sumner. I had to sell; there was no other way out of the jam Bryce and I were in; so I sacrificed my sentiment for my boy. However, the new owner has been wonderfully kind and thoughtful. She reorganized that old skid-road so even an old blind duffer like me can find his way in and out without getting lost—and she had this easy-chair made for me. I have told Judge Moore, who represents the unknown owner, to extend my thanks to his client. But words are so empty, Shirley Sumner. If that new owner could only understand how grateful I am—how profoundly her courtesy touches me——"

"Her courtesy?" Shirley echoed. "Did a woman buy the Giants?"

He smiled down at her. "Why, certainly. Who but a woman—and a dear, kind, thoughtful woman—would have thought to have this chair made and brought up here for me?"

Fell a long silence between them; then John Cardigan's trembling hand went groping out toward the girl's. "Why, how stupid of me not to have guessed it immediately!" he said. "You are the new owner. My dear child, if the silent prayers of a very unhappy old man will bring God's blessing on you—there, there, girl! I didn't intend to make you weep. What a tender heart it is, to be sure!"

She took his great toil-worn hand, and her hot tears fell on it, for his gentleness, his benignancy, had touched her deeply. "Oh, you must not tell anybody! You musn't," she cried.

He put his hand on her shoulder as she knelt before him. "Good land of love, girl, what made you do it? Why should a girl like you give a hundred thousand for my Valley of the Giants? Were you"—hesitatingly—"your uncle's agent?"

"No, I bought it myself—with my own money. My uncle doesn't know I am the new owner. You see, he wanted it—for nothing."

"Ah, yes. I suspected as much a long time ago. Your uncle is the modern type of business man. Not very much of an idealist, I'm afraid. But tell me why you decided to thwart the plans of your relative."

"I knew it hurt you terribly to sell your Giants; they were dear to you for sentimental reasons. I understood, also, why you were forced to sell; so I—well, I decided the Giants would be safer in my possession than in my uncle's. In all probability he would have logged this valley for the sake of the clear seventy-two-inch boards he could get from these trees."

"That does not explain satisfactorily, to me, why you took sides with a stranger against your own kin," John Cardigan persisted. "There must be a deeper and more potent reason, Miss Shirley Sumner."

"Well," Shirley made answer, glad he could not see the flush of confusion and embarrassment that crimsoned her cheek, "when I came to Sequoia last May, your son and I met, quite accidentally. The stage to Sequoia had already gone, and he was gracious enough to invite me to make the journey in his car. Then we recalled having met as children, and presently I gathered from his conversation that he and his John-partner, as he called you, were very dear to each other. I was witness to your meeting that night—I saw him take you in his big arms and hold you tight because you'd—gone blind while he was away having a good time. And you hadn't told him! I thought that was brave of you; and later, when Bryce and Moira McTavish told me about you—how kind you were, how you felt your responsibility toward your employees and the community—well, I just couldn't help a leaning toward John-partner and John-partner's boy, because the boy was so fine and true to his father's ideals."

"Ah, he's a man. He is indeed," old John Cardigan murmured proudly. "I dare say you'll never get to know him intimately, but if you should——"

"I know him intimately," she corrected him. "He saved my life the day the log-train ran away. And that was another reason. I owed him a debt, and so did my uncle; but Uncle wouldn't pay his share, and I had to pay for him."

"Wonderful," murmured John Cardigan, "wonderful! But still you haven't told me why you paid a hundred thousand dollars for the Giants when you could have bought them for fifty thousand. You had a woman's reason, I dare say, and women always reason from the heart, never the head. However, if you do not care to tell me, I shall not insist. Perhaps I have appeared unduly inquisitive."

"I would rather not tell you," she answered.

A gentle, prescient smile fringed his old mouth; he wagged his leonine head as if to say: "Why should I ask, when I know?" Fell again a restful silence. Then:

"Am I allowed one guess, Miss Shirley Sumner?"

"Yes, but you would never guess the reason."

"I am a very wise old man. When one sits in the dark, one sees much that was hidden from him in the full glare of the light. My son is proud, manly, independent, and the soul of honor. He needed a hundred thousand dollars; you knew it. Probably your uncle informed you. You wanted to loan him some money, but—you couldn't. You feared to offend him by proffering it; had you proffered it, he would have declined it. So you bought my Valley of the Giants at a preposterous price and kept your action a secret." And he patted her hand gently, as if to silence any denial, while far down the skid-road a voice—a half-trained baritone—floated faintly to them through the forest. Somebody was singing—or rather chanting—a singularly tuneless refrain, wild and barbaric.

"What is that?" Shirley cried.

"That is my son, coming to fetch his old daddy home," replied John Cardigan. "That thing he's howling is an Indian war-song or paean of triumph—something his nurse taught him when he wore pinafores. If you'll excuse me, Miss Shirley Sumner, I'll leave you now. I generally contrive to meet him on the trail."

He bade her good-bye and started down the trail, his stick tapping against the old logging-cable stretched from tree to tree beside the trail and marking it.

Shirley was tremendously relieved. She did not wish to meet Bryce Cardigan to-day, and she was distinctly grateful to John Cardigan for his nice consideration in sparing her an interview. She seated herself in the lumber-jack's easy-chair so lately vacated, and chin in hand gave herself up to meditation on this extraordinary old man and his extraordinary son.

A couple of hundred yards down the trail Bryce met his father. "Hello, John Cardigan!" he called. "What do you mean by skallyhooting through these woods without a pilot? Eh? Explain your reckless conduct."

"You great overgrown duffer," his father retorted affectionately, "I thought you'd never come." He reached into his pocket for a handkerchief, but failed to find it and searched through another pocket and still another. "By gravy, son," he remarked presently, "I do believe I left my silk handkerchief—the one Moira gave me, for my last birthday—up yonder. I wouldn't lose that handkerchief for a farm. Skip along and find for me, son. I'll wait for you here. Don't hurry."

"I'll be back in a pig's whisper," his son replied, and started briskly up the trail, while his father leaned against a madrone tree and smiled his prescient little smile.

Bryce's brisk step on the carpet of withered brown twigs aroused Shirley from her reverie. When she looked up he was standing in the center of the little amphitheater gazing at her.

"You—you!" she stammered, and rose as if to flee from him.

"The governor sent me back to look for his handkerchief, Shirley," he explained. "He didn't tell me you were here. Guess he didn't hear you." He advanced smilingly toward her. "I'm tremendously glad to see you today, Shirley," he said, and paused beside her. "Fate has been singularly kind to me. Indeed I've been pondering all day as to just how I was to arrange a private and confidential little chat with you, without calling upon you at your uncle's house."

"I don't feel like chatting today," she answered a little drearily—and then he noted her wet lashes. Instantly he was on one knee beside her; with the amazing confidence that had always distinguished him in her eyes his big left arm went around her, and when her hands went to her face he drew them gently away.

"I Wouldn't Lose That Handkerchief for a Farm."

"I've waited too long, sweetheart," he murmured. "Thank God, I can tell you at last all the things that have been accumulating in my heart. I love you, Shirley. I've loved you from that first day we met at the station, and all these months of strife and repression have merely served to make me love you the more. Perhaps you have been all the dearer to me because you seemed so hopelessly unattainable."

He drew her head down on his breast; his great hand patted her hot cheek; his honest brown eyes gazed earnestly, wistfully into hers. "I love you," he whispered. "All that I have—all that I am—all that I hope for—I offer to you, Shirley Sumner; and in the shrine of my heart I shall hold you sacred while life shall last. You are not indifferent to me, dear. I know you're not; but tell me—answer me—"

Her violet eyes were uplifted to his and in them he read the answer to his cry. "Ah, may I?" he murmured, and kissed her.

"Oh, my dear, impulsive, gentle big sweetheart," she whispered—and then her arms went around his neck, and the fullness of her happiness found vent in tears he did not seek to have her repress. In the safe haven of his arms she rested; and there, quite without effort or distress, she managed to convey to him something more than an inkling of the thoughts that were wont to come to her whenever they met.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Emaciated Bride Considered Beautiful.

Javanese marriage customs include a period of religious instruction for both the bride and the groom. The young man starts his instruction by paying daily visits to the priest of the village, and learning all the complicated phrases which he will have to utter on the day of his wedding. The pupil is placed in a tank of cold water and stays there submerged up to his chin while the priest bends over him and reads the Koran, the performance taking place in front of the church.

The girl begins her preparations for the great day by several weeks of semi-starvation during which time she takes only sufficient rice and hot water to sustain life. Because of this hunger strike enforced by custom, she loses considerable weight, an emaciated bride being considered a thing of beauty on the island of Java.—Detroit News.

He Had the Dough.

Mr. Blinks—Here's a $75 milliner's bill I've just paid, another instance that a fool and his money soon part.

Mrs. Blinks—I know, dear, but just think how fortunate it is that you are one of those who have money.—Boston Transcript.

Dost love life? Then do not squander time; for that's the stuff life is made of.

HARD TO ANALYZE

Wife Unable to Understand Choice Made by Her Husband, and He Is Equally at Sea.

My husband's friends are a source of never-failing psychological interest to me. I am always trying to discover why he chose them and what constitutes the secret of their enduring charm for him, says a writer in the Continental Edition of the London Mail.

Not one of them really resembles him and some possess little traits that would irritate him in anybody else.

Take, for instance, George, who is always restless; in the garden flinging about like a boy, with the children trailing after him; in the house, when they are in bed, gambolling incessantly with the kitten, setting the phonograph going, whistling, humming or vamping on the piano.

He does not know what repose means, yet he appeals to my husband, whose most obvious characteristic is serenity and calm. Then there is Edward with his absurd laugh, a kind of shrill cackle that reduces me to icy pessimism. My husband rarely smiles and only really laughs once in a month of Sundays. Nevertheless, there must be some fundamental basis of solid sympathy between the two men, for Edward is always welcomed heartily.

My husband goes fishing with another friend whom I privately call a grumbler. He must be most depressing. Then he never has a dull moment when Stephen is at hand ready to prattle about science, though my husband's sympathies are completely classical.

Tidy to meticulousness himself, he does not appear to see how most of his friends scatter things about when they stay with us, borrow his books and either put them back in the wrong places or never return them at all; leave pipes here and pouches there, and break again and again the unwritten laws that rule our household.

At times I see my husband look reflectingly at my friends, and the thought flits across my mind that they provide him with the food for speculation that his friends give me.

Then I realize that I have never analyzed my devotion to Mary, or speculated how it is that Rose's companionship is a perennial pleasure.

I suppose we are friends now because we were children together, or went to the same school, or met when happily holiday making.

Anyway, there it is, and I expect if truth were sifted from speculation causes of the same kind or others as primitive, rule my husband's choice also.

Famous Rosetta Stone.

Rosetta is a town in Egypt, on the old Bolbitic arm of the Nile. In the time of the Crusades it was a place of great strength, but was later outstripped in growth by Alexandria, and today is a small town of less than 20,000 inhabitants. The Arabs called it "Rashid," believing that Haroun-al-Rashid founded the old city. A few miles north of the town a French engineer in 1798 discovered the Rosetta stone, a tablet of basalt, with an inscription of the year 136 B. C., during the reign of Ptolemy Epiphanes. The inscription is in hieroglyphic, in demotic and in Greek. It was finally deciphered by Dr. Thomas Young, the celebrated English scholar, and formed the key to the reading of the hieroglyphic characters that have revealed so much of the history of the ancient world. The Rosetta stone was captured by the English on the defeat of the French forces in Egypt, and is now kept in the British museum. In its broken condition the tablet measures 3 feet 9 inches in height, 2 feet 4½ inches in width and 11 inches in thickness.

Canada's Coat of Arms.

Canada's new coat of arms, which is now in the hands of the College of Heralds in London, with its motto, "A Mari usque ad Mare," naturally gives an opportunity to the incorrigible punmaker to declare it is "ad-mirable," and that we "shall see what we shall see." It brings out a point that has often puzzled those who speak of the Dominion without knowing why it should be so designated. It is said that, when it was being decided what the various colonies that compose the present Canada should be called one of the councilors suggested "dominion," and quoted from the seventy-second Psalm, "He shall have dominion from sea to sea." The motto "A Mari esque ad Mare" is not a canting motto, but echoes the freedom of thought that is carried, not only from sea to sea, but across the sea to the mother country.—Christian Science Monitor.

Red Indians in Pageants.

"Indians have a great deal of dramatic ability and express themselves with unusual ease in pageant acting," says Miss Deloria, a young Dakota Indian woman who has written and directed a pageant for her people called "The Fifty Years' Trail." The pageant was given recently before a convocation of the Episcopal church in the West. Pantominic pageants prove the best because the Indians know how to act better than they know how to use their voices. Miss Deloria, who has charge of the activities for Indian girls of the Y. W. C. A., is planning other pageants of Indian setting with prologues in both English and Indian.

Five English Monarchs "Georges."

Of the English monarchs named George, the first lived 67 years, the second seventy-seven years, the third eighty-two years, and the fourth sixty-eight years. King George V is now fifty-five